

**STATEMENT OF CHRISTOPHER K. JARVI, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR,
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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON
NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS AND PUBLIC LANDS, COMMITTEE ON NATURAL
RESOURCES, CONCERNING H.R. 1528, TO AMEND THE NATIONAL TRAILS
SYSTEM ACT TO DESIGNATE THE NEW ENGLAND NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL
IN THE STATE OF CONNECTICUT AND COMMONWEALTH OF
MASSACHUSETTS AS A COMPONENT OF THE NATIONAL TRAILS SYSTEM, AND
FOR OTHER PURPOSES.**

May 15, 2007

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to appear before your committee today to discuss the views of the Department of the Interior on H.R. 1528, a bill to amend the National Trails System Act by designating the New England National Scenic Trail as a component of the National Trails System.

The Department supports enactment of this legislation.

H.R. 1528 would designate an approximately 220-mile trail route from Long Island Sound in the Town of Guilford, Connecticut to the New Hampshire-Massachusetts border in the Town of Royalston, Massachusetts as the New England National Scenic Trail. The route includes portions of the existing Mattabesett, Metacomet, and Metacomet-Monadnock trails studied under Public Law 107-338, the Metacomet-Monadnock-Mattabesett Trail Study Act of 2002. The proposed New England National Scenic Trail would be administered by the Secretary of the Interior and managed through partnership agreements with the State of Connecticut and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the Connecticut Forest and Park Association, the Appalachian Mountain Club, and other local stakeholders as appropriate. There are no existing federal lands

associated with the proposed trail route and no new federal acquisition of lands is anticipated to be necessary to accomplish the purposes of H.R. 1528.

In Spring 2006, the National Park Service produced the draft report and environmental assessment for the Metacomet Monadnock Mattabesett National Scenic Trail Feasibility Study. While the draft report is still under final Departmental review, it preliminarily concludes that the proposed route meets the definition and intent for national scenic trail establishment under the National Trails System Act. The characteristics that make the proposed route worthy of designation include its scenic mountain landscape, historic New England villages, geological resources, and an abundance of endangered and natural communities.

The route traverses the Metacomet, Mt. Tom, and Mt. Holyoke ranges offering some of New England's most outstanding scenery and geologic features. Over 50 National Register Districts abut the trail. There are outstanding views from the trail as well as links to many side trails. The trail offers some of the world's best opportunities to view volcanic, sedimentary, and glacial geology, including columnar basalt, fossils, and dinosaur footprints. Areas along the trail have an outstanding richness of habitat types, natural communities, and rare and endangered species' habitats. In Connecticut, 132 occurrences of rare species or natural communities have been documented within 1,000 feet of the trail.

In addition, one of the most important factors identified in the National Trails System Act for evaluating potential new components of the system is proximity to population centers. Through the Act, Congress recognized the need to serve the nation's population centers with quality

recreational opportunities. As such, the proposed New England National Scenic Trail offers a truly extraordinary opportunity, with over 2 million people living within 10 miles of the trail system.

H.R. 1528 would implement the environmentally preferred alternative of the draft study report and environmental assessment. This alternative was developed through a collaborative process with key trail stakeholders associated with the existing Metacomet Monadnock and Mattabesett trails, including the two states, the Appalachian Mountain Club, the Connecticut Forest and Park Association, and the 39 abutting communities. In addition, GIS mapping was cross-referenced against community land ownership data to build for the first time a database of more than 1,000 landowners on or near the trail route. These landowners and entities were all engaged directly in the study through regular mailings and invitations to information meetings and working sessions. Input from all of these sources was incorporated into the environmentally preferred alternative, which includes the following elements:

First, the “Blueprint for Management” included in the draft report was developed through input by a full range of study participants to provide the best blueprint for long-term trail viability.

The National Park Service and Trail Stewardship Council would base trail management, administration and protection efforts on this document.

Second, the draft report calls for the creation of a Trail Stewardship Council that would bring trail partners and stakeholders together on a regular basis to discuss trail issues, coordinate management and protection of the trail, and generally guide implementation of the Management

Blueprint. The Council would have advisory powers only, and would be non-regulatory in nature.

Third, the study identified no need for direct federal ownership or management of the trail. Thus, the National Park Service's role in implementing the proposed national scenic trail designation would be one of technical and financial assistance to existing trail partners, coordinated through the Trail Stewardship Council.

Fourth, a new unifying name, the New England National Scenic Trail, was suggested for national scenic trail purposes. Traditional trail names would continue to be used in guidebooks or on trail signs, as appropriate, such as the Mattabesett Trail, part of the New England National Scenic Trail.

Finally, in addition to the proposed extension to Long Island Sound in Guilford, Connecticut, a new route for the national scenic trail is proposed in the Belchertown-Leverett area of Massachusetts. The new route is envisioned to take advantage of substantial state-owned lands that can provide a quality, protected trail route, while avoiding a segment of the Metacomet-Monadnock trail almost completely devoid of protected lands.

The draft report and environmental assessment for the Metacomet Monadnock Mattabesett Trail Study was released for public and agency review in August 2006. An executive summary was mailed to all identified trail landowners and stakeholders, along with invitations to public meetings in Connecticut and Massachusetts. Approximately 60 written responses were received

between August and December 2006. The vast majority of these supported the environmentally preferred alternative, and only a few comments were received in opposition to national scenic trail designation. Consequently, while the study and the accompanying Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) document has not been finalized, the National Park Service does not anticipate making any substantive changes in the study recommendations. We hope to transmit the final report to Congress by late summer.

The Department of Justice has advised us that requiring the Secretary to manage and administer the trail consistent with the Trail Management Blueprint may raise constitutional concerns, and it would like to work with the committee on that provision.

This concludes my prepared remarks, Mr. Chairman. I will be happy to answer any questions you or other committee members may have regarding this bill.